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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 010976

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TAGS: [KJUS](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION CALLS FOR RESIGNATION OF FOREIGN  
MINISTER ARAUJO

REF: BOGOTA 8108 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer - Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary. In a stormy Senate debate on November 29, opposition politicians called on Foreign Minister Araujo to resign "for the good of Colombia" due to alleged family ties to paramilitaries. The FM's brother, Senator Alvaro Araujo, called before the Supreme Court to answer allegations of paramilitaries, said he would remain a senator and denied all charges. The FM told Congress she had the support of the president and would stay; numerous government officials and Congressional allies rose to her defense. Some of those same allies, however, later told us the FM will likely "have to go." Most predict the FM will leave within a month or two in a cabinet re-shuffle to mitigate political damage to the president. End summary.

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Opposition Calls on FM Araujo to Resign

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12. (U) In a sometimes ugly Senate debate on November 29, the opposition Liberal and Polo Parties called on Foreign Minister Maria Consuelo Araujo to resign due to alleged family ties with paramilitaries (Reftel). Liberal Senator Cecilia Lopez admitted there was no evidence linking the FM to paramilitaries or criminal acts, but she said that allegations against the FM's siblings (including Senator Alvaro Araujo, who was called to testify before the Supreme Court) made it "politically un-sustainable" for the FM to represent Colombia. She also accused the FM of influence trafficking for intervening with National Prosecutor (Fiscal) Mario Iguaran to inquire about Senator Araujo's legal situation. Lopez, speaking for the Liberal party, and Senator Jorge Robledo speaking for Polo, called on FM Araujo to step aside for the good of the country.

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FM Says She Will Stay

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13. (U) FM Araujo told the assembled Senate plenary she would not resign and claimed the full support of President Alvaro Uribe. She admitted she had asked Fiscal Mario Iguaran about her brother's case. Araujo did not directly address the accusations against her family members, providing a summary of her government experience and commitment to public service. She asked Congress to judge her on results, and said Colombia would be best served if she kept her post. Only Conservative Senator Alberto Gerlein rose to congratulate the FM after her intervention. Fiscal Iguaran, Peace Commissioner Juan Restrepo, Interior and Justice Minister Carlos Holguin, U Party Senator Luis Velez, and Cambio Radical Senator Nancy Patricia Gutierrez also spoke in defense of the FM.

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# Araujo Family Under Fire

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14. (U) Senator Araujo (of the coalition party Alas Equipo Colombiano) rose at almost midnight to say he would remain a senator, and to respond to opposition charges in front of a still packed Senate chamber. In a passionate speech, punctuated with interruptions, screaming and personal attacks from all sides, Araujo denied the charges leveled against him, claimed he had never threatened the Uribe Administration, and said "I am not--and never have been --a paramilitary." Iguaran confirmed that the FM's other brother, Sergio, and sister Ana Maria were also under investigation for possible ties to ex-para leader "Jorge 40."

15. (C) Alvaro Araujo is at the center of allegations that the Araujo family is tied to the paramilitaries. Still, Judicial Police (Dijin) chief Oscar Naranjo told us November 30 that Dijin has no concrete evidence linking him to criminal acts. If he were tried today, he would be acquitted. Separately, DAS chief Andres Penate told us he was not aware of information indicating that Senator Araujo committed any crimes.

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## Foreign Minister Araujo May "Have to go"

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16. (C) Numerous contacts told us after the debate that the FM will soon have to resign. Senator Velez--who was chosen by the government to defend the FM in the Senate--told us only hours later that Araujo "will have to leave," probably after a month or two delay to avoid political damage to President Uribe. U Party Senator Martha Lucia Ramirez, Cambio Radical leader German Vargas Lleras, and Conservative Party Senator Efraim Cepeda--all coalition members--agreed

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the FM's position would soon be untenable, and predicted Araujo would be gone within a month or two. The most likely scenario is that the FM would be replaced in a January cabinet re-shuffle. The FM's congressional liaison, Karen Mendoza, told us the FM had received "mixed messages" from congressional allies. She said the FM was struggling to produce an international public relations plan in the event her family members end up in jail for paramilitary ties. On December 1, U Party leader Carlos Gracia told the press he thought Foreign Minister Araujo should resign.

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=====CABLE ENDS=====